Nurse Terry Crane had two great loves – traveling and nursing... but lovely Terry soon found herself tangled in a web of confusion and ignorance. Could she resolve her issues in time to make the most of her traveling nurse assignment?

by Patrick J. Fuerstenau
Upon her arrival at Rising Sun Memorial Hospital in Jonesville, Florida young nurse Terry noticed that this new facility was nothing like she expected. Everything that Terry had come accustomed to at her former workplace must now be forgotten as she tries to learn all new policies and protocols. Before the start of her new position as a traveling ICU nurse, Terry forgot to ask her recruiter as well as her hiring manager the all important details of the job and now she must scramble to find the answers she desperately needs to know. “I know that each hospital has its own way of doing things, but how different could they be?” said Terry. “I thought it was pretty standard in the way nurses would document, chart and whatnot. I wish I had known these things ahead of time so I could just focus on doing my job...”

As a travel nurse, it’s critical to get acclimated to the workings of your new facility and unit as quickly as possible. While orientation may vary between each hospital you’ve worked with, each facility has its own way of getting you familiarized with your new workplace and providing you with the tools you need to succeed during your assignment.

Before you even step foot into your new facility, there are a few steps you should take to get yourself prepared. No matter if you’ve been a traveler for 10 years or 10 months, there will always be something different to learn about each facility and their procedures. When you’ve finally got all the details of your next position finalized, make sure your staffing agency provides you with some basic orientation and preparation plans for the facility you’ll be working with. Here are some important questions regarding facility protocols and so on that you should ask your recruiter prior to starting your next travel nursing assignment. It would also be wise to ask the hiring manager similar questions during your interview.

By asking these important questions you’ll be able to get a complete picture of what you can expect and what the facility will expect of you. This will enable you to start your new assignment without the guessing game.

- What kind of orientation you should expect? Is it a brief 1-2 day introduction or more in-depth? Is it a general orientation or orientation of the specific floor where you’ll be working?
- What time and where should you report to orientation?
- What’s used for charting, documentation and computer systems?
- Will there be any testing required in orientation? For example, PBDS testing.
- What shift will I be working?
- Will there be a requirement to be oncall, and if so, how many hours?
- What are the expectations about holiday and weekend work?
- Might there be any chances at having to change shifts during the assignment?
- Will there be a need to float to other units?
- What is your nurse-to-patient ratio?
- Are there other travelers on the floor?
- Ask about the community—its nightlife, populations served, etc...
Getting organized can be beneficial when time comes to start a new position and having a list of routine questions you’d like the answers to will be a great help. “When do I draw my AM labs? Who does the ABG’s, the nurse or respiratory? How do I find a physician’s phone number? Is there a pharmacist in house over night? Is there a rapid response team available?” All these questions, along with about a hundred others are things that will vary from hospital to hospital and are things a traveler will need to know. Obviously you will never think to ask about every situation you may encounter, but knowing some of the routine care issues will help the traveler acclimate to the unit.

Once you’ve made it to your new destination it wouldn’t hurt for you to do a “dry run” and see how long it takes to get to the hospital and where exactly you’re to be at the start of orientation. Once you begin orientation it is imperative for you to ask questions, don’t just assume you’ll figure it out later. Also, bring with you all your licenses, immunization records and any certifications. Even though this would have been forwarded to the hospital prior to your start, things can get lost in the shuffle.

Top Ten Important Travel Nursing Documents Checklist

1. Your travel nursing resume along with your education information
2. Two letters of reference from supervisors preferable
3. Nursing License
4. CPR
5. Any certifications needed to work in your specialty
6. Social security card
7. Physical (no more than 1 year old)
8. TB skin test (no more than 1 yr old)
9. Proof of immunizations or titer: Mumps, Rubeola, Rubella, & Varicella
10. Proof of Hepatitis B series, titer or signed declination form

Having worked at T. J. Memorial for so long, nurse Terry forgot what it was like to start a new job and this new job was unlike any she had imagined. Being a traveling nurse takes a lot of patience and preparation - all of which Terry possesses. However the staffing agency she was working with failed to tell her all the necessary documents she would need in order to start leaving her to feel ill prepared. Now before Terry can start her new travel nursing position the nurse manager has requested proof of her licensure for the state of Florida and other important documents. “I figured that these would all just be stored in some databank somewhere! I didn’t know I would actually have to have copies of all my certifications!” Terry screamed as she phoned her recruiter. “Why didn’t you tell me I needed to bring this stuff along? This will not look good to my fellow peers!”

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Ready. Set. Nurse!

Usually upon arrival you are given a tour of the facilities and told the usual, where supplies can be found, facility policies and so on. Each hospital may have different equipment that is used for patient care so make sure you are given instruction on how to use any of these you are not familiar with. Besides the equipment, you should also familiarize yourself with the resource people of your unit.

By becoming acquainted with the charge nurse and unit secretary you may find it easier to find the answers to questions regarding shift routine, assignment expectations, order entry and retrieval. Also make sure you have the name and phone number of your preceptor as well as the numbers for members of the entire unit, ask your preceptor who you should call should you have further questions. You should also ask for a list of frequently called numbers such as the lab, pharmacy, admissions and any physicians in which you will be in contact with often.

Important and Frequently Called Phone Numbers

Nursing Preceptor _________________________________________________________

Unit Manager _____________________________________________________________

Pharmacy _______________________________________________________________

Lab _____________________________________________________________________

Admissions ___________________________________________________________________

Physicians ___________________________________________________________________

Nursing Unit: Names & Phone Numbers

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
Check in before you check out.

If for any reason you do not feel that you were oriented properly by a facility, it is important that you make your staffing agency aware of this. Most problems that arise with travelers occur within the first few weeks of the assignment. If the nurse manager has not taken the time to check in with you during the first couple weeks, make sure you address them with any concerns and questions you may have. Adequate orientation is critical to a travel nurse. After a few assignments you will be able to develop a routine of your own orientation that you can implement at each facility your travels take you.

Other questions you could ask to help with your orientation:

- Why is the hospital looking to fill the position right now?
- What shift are you looking to fill?
- Who will be scheduling me?
- Is it possible I will ever be cancelled on a shift?
- What would be the likelihood of extending the assignment?
- What would be the maximum length I could extend?
- What nursing management model do you use on the unit?
- Is overtime often available?
- What is traffic like in the area and safety of the area?
- Have you heard from other travelers what housing they like nearby?
- What is the parking situation (ease of parking, any cost to park)
- Do you provide lockers and or uniforms?

Notes: __________________________________________________________
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Having only been at her new travel nursing job for a couple weeks, she quickly realized that there were many things she loved about her new job and a few she could do without. She thought she was able to perform her job above and beyond the expectations of her new employer, but she would never know because no one ever told her. She thought to herself, no news is good news and carried on as usual, but there was something that still nagged at her.

“If I’m doing something wrong, would they tell me?” she asked a fellow nurse.

“Don’t worry honey. You’d know - that’s one thing they’re quick to tell you around here.” said the other nurse.

“If you want to know something, you’ll have to ask for yourself. We’re so understaffed here that our managers rarely have any time to themselves, let alone time to praise anyone! Good luck.”
Nurse Terry’s first experience as a traveling nurse was quite an adventure and overall a memorable one. However, there were elements that she’d soon like to forget. Despite all the issues she had during her first assignment, she learned many valuable lessons that she will apply to her next traveling nurse job. It was unfortunate that the agency with which she worked for was ill prepared, but that wouldn’t stop Terry from trying to make the most out of her first travel assignment. If there’s one thing she learned - a nurse’s orientation is probably the most important part to ensuring a successful campaign as a traveler. Of course, having the right agency in your corner is also a major help, but even so, your own preparedness and attentiveness during orientation can make or break your travel nursing assignment.

Travel Nurse Orientation Worksheet

Policy and procedure location:

Meal break process:

Report/shift change process:

Order notation process:

Cardiac/Resp arrest process: (ie push code button, call certain number, etc)

Location of crash cart:

Critical lab results process:

Special thanks to David and Epstein for their knowledge and expertise:


**Epstein LaRue, RN, BS**, host of the website *Highway Hypodermics* and author of the book, “*Highway Hypodermics: Your Road Map To Travel Nursing.*"
Terry Crane, a glamorous young debutante, shocked her family when she decided to become a nurse. At the turn of the century nursing was considered a humble profession, and Terry was drawn to it and spurned her life of idleness among the rich. When she entered nursing school, little did she know that her nursing profession would take her across the United States and back. Her first permanent nursing position at the famed Trapper John Memorial Hospital was exactly the experience she craved.

She worked her way up the ranks and quickly became the manager of the Intensive Care Unit, but she never seemed quite satisfied. Again Terry would go against the grain and leave her position as manager to follow a dream she had not yet realized. Soon after her departure from the comforts of Trapper John Memorial Hospital Terry began to explore her options as a nurse and as luck would have it she found a job that would take her as far away from her family as she pleased.

Terry fell in love with travel nursing and all the different cities she got to visit such as San Francisco, New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles and just about every other major city in the U.S. However, there was one thing about her love of travel nursing that left a bad aftertaste with her... After all, she was a former manager who didn’t need to be trained, what could be so different about this job than the last?